

Probes on the Great Wall

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Abstract

Of all the huge military defensive projects constructed in ancient and middle century in the world, the Great Wall in China was of course the greatest one for its solid structure, long history, and great influence. As for today's Chinese people, the Great Wall is the greatest relics handed down by our ancestor. Even hundreds of years ago, the Great Wall was listed as one of the 7 greatest masterpieces in the world. In 1961, it was listed to be the first group of protected monument by the Chinese State Council. As the world's largest cultural relic, the Great Wall, an imposing ancient defense structure in China, was inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1987.

Keywords: military defensive projects, World Heritage, beacon-fire, nomadic groups, national unification, Hexi Corridor, architecture, archaeology, culture and art treasury, agricultural and nomadic civilization

1. A Survey of the Great Wall

The Great Wall extends over 6,000 kilometers in North China. It rises and falls like a magical dragon keeping the spiritual lifeline of China. The Great Wall, as we know today, was mostly built during the Ming Dynasty. It starts from Shanhaiguan Pass in the east to Jiayuguan Pass in the west traversing provinces of Liaoning, Hebei, Beijing, Tianjin, Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Shaanxi and Gansu.

2. History of the Great Wall

The Great Wall was first built in the 7th century B.C. when China was still divided into many small states. After the unification of China in 221 B.C. the first emperor of Qin Dynasty linked the walls of the three states in the north and formed the first "Wan Li Chang Cheng" (ten thousand Li Great Wall). Since then, the Great Wall was rebuilt, modified or extended throughout China for over 2,000 years. Most parts of the Great Wall seen today were built in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). In some areas, two walls built in two different dynasties can be seen running side by side.

3. The Reason of Building the Great Wall

The Great Wall was built in ancient times to protect China against invasion by nomadic tribes from the north, consoled rulers' administration and wipe out the threatening factors.

4. Historical Evaluation of the Great Wall

4.1 Protective Effects as a Military Project

As a military defensive project, the Great Wall provided a peaceful environment for people's living and producing. Those towers on the wall located at equal intervals from each other are called beacon-fire towers. When soldiers found enemy troops approaching, they would launch smoke signals from the tower as an alarm. When the soldiers in the neighboring beacon-fire tower saw the smoke, they would do the same. In this way, the signals would be relayed to send the news to the capital. At that time, owing to the slow communication technology, this method of sending warning is really great.

4.2 Promoting Economic Development in North

Measures taken at the aims of providing enough military supplies stimulated the increasing of economy in north. In Han Dynasty, because of the long time needed to build the Great Wall, the government ordered that common people should guard the wall with army, open up desolate land and produce food and clothes themselves, which accelerated the economic development and saved military cost. In today's Gansu, Inner Mongolia and Liaoyang, there are lots of unearthed artifacts of Qin and Han Dynasty, which were taken by the immigrants.

The Great Wall in Hexi section contributed to promoting economy in northwest. After Huoqubing opened up Hexi Corridor, generals in Han Dynasty and envoys in western countries communicate with each other, promoting trade mutually.

Let's see the protective effect to northern and center part's economy. Take Ming Dynasty for example, in JiaQing period, Mongolia invaded the south and destroyed its economy, which was resulted from disrepair of border defense. However, during LongQing Wanli period, the effective consolidation of frontier defense led to the increasing of the economy.

4.3 A Bound Linking up Different Nationalities

The Great Wall served as a bound to integrate Han nationality with ethnic minorities in north on the basis of feudal civilization, and played an important role in the process of national unification. All people in different nationalities hated wars which brought disaster to them. Their common wish was to live and produce in peaceful environment, get on well with each other and benefit mutually. People communicated by trading, and the Great Wall shield the disordered plunder and promoted ordered trade. Bartering tea for horses brought prosperity to many cities along the Great Wall. Some strategic passes and fortresses became important cities and towns. The Great Wall has become a sign of peace and stability for various ethnic groups. The important pass of the Great Wall and the towns along it served as markets for trading and communicating between different groups. For instance, emperor Wu in west Han ordered to extend the Great Wall, and therefore people in Han and Huns came and went under the Great Wall. That laid a solid foundation for improving relationships between Han and Huns. In the year 51B.C, southern Huns submitted Han. The integration of Han with nomadic minority marked the beginning of multi-national country. So it is believed that the Great Wall was a milestone in the process of national unification.

4.4 A Culture and Art Treasury

As one of the most grandeur in human's history, the Great Wall accumulates rich multi-culture. It was an integration of spiritual products and material products. From the Great Wall, you can find discrepancy of productive and living style and system between agricultural and nomadic civilization. Meanwhile, many military strategies were made under inspiration of the Great Wall. For 2000 years, the Great Wall has been regarded as a center for communication between different nationalities. Through communication, different nations' culture was enriched. For example, emperor Wuling in Zhao state ordered his people to learn wearing, riding and shooting from Hu nation. In addition, the Great Wall itself is a great work of art. There were many engraving and decorations in tickets of the pass of the Great Wall. The Great Wall displays cultural quintessence of China.

The Great Wall has appealed to many learned people, soldiers, poets and leaders generation by generation, who composed large amount of literature works inspired by the Great Wall including folk songs, tales, legendary and poems. Some of the compositions described grandeur of the Great Wall; some criticized the ruthless rulers and showed sympathy to common people. Unfolding a considerable part of Chinese culture beyond the wall, the Great Wall has long been united into Chinese mythology and popular symbolism. The most interesting of several legends is about the collapse of a section of the Great Wall caused by MengJiangnu, who cried bitterly over the death of her husband in the construction of the Great Wall.

4.5 Contribution to Cultural Communication between the East and the West

In period of emperor Wu in west Han, Zhangqian paid a visit to west countries and opened up "silk road", which was from Xian (in Shaanxi province) to east Mediterranean Sea. Since then, China has exchanged materials and culture with the west frequently. Good exchanges such as Chinese silk, African ivory, and Roman license increase the contacts between the East and West. Contact with the Kushan Empire led to the introduction of Buddhism to China from India in the first century.

5. Realistic Significance of the Great Wall

As a great military defensive project, it has completed its mission. The history value of this grand project has shifted to be culture treasure of China and culture wealth of mankind. As a symbol of China, it has new realistic meaning.

5.1 A Culture Relic Handed by Our Ancestor

The Great Wall has become a spiritual symbol of China; the Great Wall shows diligence, industry, wisdom of Chinese people. It is a historical milestone and mankind civilization that we should be proud of. Nowadays, we have been digging out considerable culture about Chinese politic, economy, military, history, geology, architecture, archaeology, literature, folk customs and so on. This great culture tradition has always been nourishing Chinese

people and contributes to spirit and material civilization.

5.2 A Spiritual Symbol of China

The Great Wall shows will, diligence, industry, courage and power of the Chinese people. When hundreds of thousands of peasants, soldiers and prisoners built the wall in the mountains with their efforts, they began to create a wonder in the world history, one of the outstanding masterpieces left by mankind on the globe. Built in a period of about a thousand years, the Great Wall shows the firm resolution of the Chinese nation to protect its peaceful life. Even now, people are singing in the National Anthem: "With our flesh and blood, let us build our new Great Wall." Inspired by this spirit, Chinese people defeated the invader of Japanese. Today, the spirit of the Great Wall has always been inspiring Chinese people to contribute to the construction of our nation, and to create more glorious and great China under common efforts.

Today, the Great Wall has been listed as important protected heritage in the world by UNESCO. Deng Xiaoping once made inscription for the Great Wall "Love my Great Wall, Love my China", which added proud, confidence and patriotism to our Chinese people. Meanwhile, as famous places of interest, it appealed and appeals to many tourists both at home and abroad.

5.3 Contribution to China's Tourism Industry

Today the Great Wall has lost its practical use, but people are coming from any corner of the world to respect its grandeur and express their feelings. "The sky is high; the fleecy clouds are bright. We watch the southbound wild geese out of sight." The Great Wall is encouraging the Chinese nation to march on for ever. The Great Wall is encouraging the Chinese nation to march on for ever. "He who doesn't reach the Great Wall is not a real man." is an ancient China saying that encourage all Chinese descendents to realize their dreams. If you overlook the Great Wall on top of a mountain into the distance, the Great Wall looks like a giant dragon and the mountain ranges are like a vast sea; the giant dragon seems to rise and fall irregularly, twisting and turning in the seething waves. The surrounding view also makes one feel so relaxed and happy. But it was no easy job for the ancient people to complete such a wonder. In the construction of the Great Wall, a great number of labors lost their lives. The story of "Meng Jiangnu Weeping on the Great Wall" took place here.

The Great Wall has made great contribution to China's tourism industry. It adds to tax revenue, create more value to GDP, and promote other industries such as Hospitality Service, transportation, accommodation, and the first and second industry and so on. Consumption is also inspired and vice verse promotes the increasing of China's economy.

6. Proposal for the Protection of the Great Wall

As the world's largest cultural relics, the Great Wall, an imposing ancient defense structure in China, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1987. Yet much part of the Great Wall has been seriously damaged. The 2002 Great Wall survey showed that, less than 20% of the Great wall built in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) is still in good shape, and less than 30% are recognizable as a relic site. Today no more than 2,500 km of the Wall, barely half of its original length, still remains.

- As the critical situation demands immediate action, we propose the following to the whole society:
- Strengthen the implementation of the Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics and other related regulations. Formulate a special law for protecting the Great Wall and put its exploration and utilization in a legalized framework.
- Improve the administrative functions of the departments in charge of cultural relic protection to rectify the disorder in the Great Wall protection and to raise public awareness in this regard.
- Carry out a comprehensive and scientific investigation on the Great Wall in different historical periods and set up a complete record of the Great Wall. Map out an overall plan for its protection, nailing down the areas of protection and establish protective zones.
- Set up China Foundation for Great Wall Protection to guarantee adequate funds for the work.

The administrative capacity in the Great Wall protection and its practical results go beyond the Great Wall itself. It shows to the world China's strength in cultural relic protection. To enable the Great Wall to stand erect in the Orient for generations to come, let's act now and join in any ways in the great endeavor to protect the Great Wall.

Let the Great Wall go to the world, and preserve the ancient Wall for our children and their children!

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